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RR RUEHBZ RUEHGI RUEHJO RUEHMR RUEHRN
DE RUEHKI #0725/01 2470727
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
R 030727Z SEP 08
FM AMEMBASSY KINSHASA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 8377
RUEHDK/AMEMBASSY DAKAR 0219
RUEHRO/AMEMBASSY ROME 1477
INFO RUCNSAD/SADC COLLECTIVE
RUEHXR/RWANDA COLLECTIVE
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC
RUCPDOC/DEPT OF COMMERCE WASHDC
RUZEJAA/JAC MOLESWORTH RAF MOLESWORTH UK
RHMFIISS/HQ USEUCOM VAIHINGEN GE

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 KINSHASA 000725

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

STATE PASS DEPT OF TRANSPORTATION
USAID FOR OFDA: MSHIRLEY and AFR/EA

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: FAIR ECON PGOV CG
SUBJECT: PLANE CRASHES NEAR BUKAVU; NO SIGN OF SURVIVORS

REF: KINSHASA 349
KINSHASA 367
KINSHASA 363

¶11. (SBU) Summary. An Air Serv International plane carrying seventeen persons, including two pilots, crashed in heavy rain near Bukavu on September 1. Rescue efforts remain underway, but there are no signs of survivors. Several UN and aid workers were on board, but no American citizens were listed on the flight manifest. Initial reports indicate the crash was likely due to weather-related conditions. The National Transportation Security Board (NTSB) offered to send an investigator to assist with the crash investigation, but the GDRC's Civil Aviation Authority (AAC) has thus far declined. USG employees and contractors are already prohibited from flying on domestically owned and operated airlines, and Air Serv is one of the few remaining options for official USG in-country travel. End Summary.

Crash Wreckage Found, All Seventeen Presumed Dead

¶12. (U) A humanitarian plane carrying fifteen passengers and two pilots crashed into a mountain near Bukavu in the South Kivu province on September 1. The plane, operated by U.S.-based Air Serv International, lost contact with ground control and went missing just before landing in a severe rainstorm. The flight was scheduled to land in Bukavu after leaving Kisangani in the Orientale province. Rescue helicopter pilots spotted the wreckage on the slope of a mountain eight miles northwest of Bukavu on September 2, but there was no sign of survivors. The rescue helicopter was unable to land, and a second, smaller helicopter was reportedly sent to the crash site.

¶13. (SBU) The plane, a 19-seat Beechcraft 1900 with two South African pilots, was carrying nine passengers from the UN Development Program (including one Canadian citizen), two from the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, three from Handicap International, and one from Doctors without Borders. There were no American citizens reported to be onboard.

GDRC Civil Aviation Declines Help from NTSB

¶14. (SBU) An investigator from the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) will be traveling to Kenya on September 3, and told EconOff that he would be available to assist the AAC during any crash investigations. The NTSB investigator, who has a close working relationship with the GDRC's Civil Aviation Authority (AAC), assisted the GDRC following the Hewa Bora crash on April 15. (Refs

A and B)

15. (SBU) EconOff relayed the offer to the AAC Director, Fortunat Richard Nyanguile, on September 2. The Director was reluctant to accept any offer of assistance at this time because the plane was registered in South Africa instead of the DRC, implying there would be no follow-on investigation. The Director also said the crash was weather-related and not due to any technical failure. (Comment: While the crash may indeed have been strictly weather-related, it is too early to rule out any technical problems. Although AAC has accepted NTSB assistance in the past, Nyanguile seemed to be positioning for a hands-off approach for the aftermath of this latest crash. End Comment.)

Dwindling Options for USG Travel

16. (SBU) Air Serv International is a not-for-profit aviation organization based in Warrenton, Virginia that supports the large community of aid workers, UN/MONUC representatives, and members of the diplomatic corps in the DRC. Following the April 15 Hewa Bora crash, Post's Emergency Action Committee prohibited USG employees and contractors from traveling on domestically owned and operated airlines. (Ref C) Air Serv, Mission Aviation Fellowship (MAF), and MONUC flights have since been the only options available for official USG in-country travel. An Air Serv representative told EconOff on September 2 that all future Air Serv flights will continue as scheduled, but even a temporary grounding of some flights will exacerbate an already severe shortage of transportation options.

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